

**Twenty-third Meeting of States Parties
to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,**
*(Conference Room 1, Conference Building
Monday, 10 June 2013, 10:15 a.m.)*

**Opening remarks by Ms. Patricia O'Brien,
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs,
The Legal Counsel**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Ambassador Hoxha, on your election as President of the twenty-third Meeting of States Parties. Allow me, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to convey to you and to participating delegations his best wishes for fruitful and productive deliberations.

I am honoured to join you on the occasion of the opening of the twenty-third Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

As you are aware, last year was an auspicious year, as we marked the thirtieth anniversary of the opening for signature of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. A wide variety of events

were held to celebrate this occasion, culminating in a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly on 10 December 2012.

The Convention is now entering the fourth decade since its entry into force. By providing the legal framework within which all activities in the oceans and seas must be carried out, it has proven itself worthy of the title of the “constitution of the oceans.” This title was first given to it by the President of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, Ambassador Koh of Singapore, and by generations of scholars and diplomats after him.

At a time when the ocean and its resources have become the focus of many international legal instruments, processes and initiatives, the role of the Convention is more important than ever in strengthening international peace and security and ensuring sustainable development of the oceans and seas.

Support for the Convention also continues to grow and we are getting closer to achieving the goal of universal participation. I am very pleased to note that, since the last meeting of States Parties, Ecuador, Swaziland and Timor-Leste have become parties to the Convention. This brings the total number of parties to 165, including the European Union.

Distinguished delegates,

This Meeting will provide States Parties with an opportunity to hear details on the work of the three institutions established by the

Convention, namely the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

I would like to join you, Ambassador Hoxha, in welcoming to this Meeting the President of the Tribunal, H.E. Mr. Shunji Yanai, the Secretary-General of the Authority, H.E. Mr. Nii Odunton, and the Chairperson of the Commission, Mr. Lawrence Awosika.

Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge and to highlight the important contribution of these bodies towards the advancement of the goals of the Convention.

The Tribunal continues its essential work in the settlement of disputes relating to oceans and seas. A growing number of States have referred their disputes to the Tribunal and its case law is touching upon an expanding range of law of the sea issues. In providing innovative solutions to address these issues, the Tribunal has contributed significantly to the development of the modern jurisprudence in the field of the law of the sea.

The International Seabed Authority continues to fulfil its vital role in organizing and controlling activities and administering resources in the Area. Last year, the Authority adopted Regulations on Prospecting and Exploration for Cobalt-Rich Ferromanganese Crusts. It also approved a work plan for the development of regulations for exploitation of polymetallic nodules in the Area by 2016.

Interest in the work of the Authority has continued to increase, as reflected in the growing number of contracts which have been, or are about to be, concluded for exploration in the Area. Last year, the Legal and Technical Commission of the Authority also approved the first environmental management plan for the Clarion-Clipperton Fracture Zone. We look forward to hearing more about this important progress later in the Meeting.

Distinguished delegates,

The issue of the increasing workload of the Commission on the Limits on the Continental Shelf has been the subject of intense and protracted discussion in this forum. The importance of this issue is confirmed by the fact that the number of submissions received by the Commission continues to grow.

In this connection, it is important to recall that, following a request from this Meeting, the Commission decided that it would hold three sessions of seven weeks each in 2013, for a total of 21 weeks of meetings, including four weeks of plenary meetings. Accordingly, for the first time, the Commission met for seven weeks when it held its thirty-first session earlier this year and it will do the same in a few weeks, from 15 July to 30 August, for its thirty-second session.

In addition, the Commission decided to adopt a new working arrangement so there would be six subcommissions actively considering submissions at any given time, which is an unprecedented number of submissions. These changes demonstrate the commitment

and dedication of the members of the Commission towards addressing their workload and delivering recommendations at an increasing pace. We are grateful for their concerted efforts.

I would like to mention, at this juncture, that the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs works closely with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the International Seabed Authority on the basis of the agreements of relationship concluded between those bodies and the United Nations. In addition, the Division devotes a substantive amount of its work to the servicing of the Commission. In this connection I would like to reiterate that the Division will continue to provide the Commission with all the services and support that it requires and to closely cooperate with the Tribunal and the Authority.

Distinguished delegates,

As you will recall, in 2008 the General Assembly decided that the 8th of June of every year would be designated as "World Oceans Day". The occasion provides an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the oceans for the humankind and for the planet. This year marks the fifth "World Oceans Day" and the theme is "Oceans and People".

To celebrate this event, the Division has organized a very interesting panel, in cooperation with the American Museum of Natural History. It will be held later today, since World Oceans Day happened to be on a Saturday this year. It will take place from 1.15pm to 2.45pm in

Conference Room 6 of the North Lawn Building. I do encourage all delegations to attend this event.

A photo exhibition entitled "Oceans" will also be on display in the temporary gallery space in the Secretariat. Keeping with our tradition, last Saturday, the Empire State Building was also lit in the colours white, blue and purple to mark the occasion of World Oceans Day 2013. In addition, last Friday the United Nations Postal Administration issued a commemorative stamp to mark World Oceans Day, which is now available for sale.

Distinguished delegates,

Some of you know that this will be the last year in which I have the privilege to address the Meeting of States Parties in my capacity as the Legal Counsel of the United Nations. Over the past five years, I have had the pleasure of working directly with you and through the Division on issues relating to oceans and the law of the sea. It has been an interesting and truly rewarding experience.

I trust that the States Parties will continue to advance the goals of the Convention. Let us recall that these goals include peaceful uses of the oceans, equitable and efficient utilization of their resources, conservation of their living resources, and the study, protection and preservation of the marine environment.

Allow me to convey to you one last time my best wishes for your fruitful deliberations and a successful outcome of this and future Meetings of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Thank you very much.
